

RICHMOND COUNTY NATURAL AREA INVENTORY

MARKS CREEK CORRIDOR MACROSITE - MARKS CREEK POWERLINE

Site Significance: regional
USGS Quadrangle: Diggs

Size: 304 acres
Ownership: private

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: Marks Creek Powerline features good to high quality streamhead pocosin communities and supports populations of ten rare plants and one rare animal. One federally endangered plant occurs: rough-leaved loosestrife (*Lysimachia asperulifolia*), very rare in Richmond County. The site supports a strong population of the globally rare streamhead lily (*Lilium pyrophilum*). The spring-flowering goldenrod (*Solidago verna*, NC threatened) population is the largest in the Sandhills region of the state. The site supports robust numbers of pine barrens treefrog (*Hyla andersonii*).

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: The site is part of the extensive Marks Creek Corridor, a natural area running the entire length of Marks Creek and supporting extensive swamp forest. Surrounding land is used for small farms, timber production, rural residences. The site lies within the Sandhills region of the coastal plain.

SITE DESCRIPTION: The powerline traverses the head ends of a series of seven streamheads, all tributaries of Marks Creek. All are kept open by mowing or bushhogging of the powerline and thus provide broad areas available for seepage-dependent plants. The amount of seepage is variable and this is reflected in the species composition; several streamheads are relatively depauperate re species diversity while others are relatively rich in species. Vegetation in general is composed of coarse herbs, graminoids, ferns, shrubs, and tree sprouts. A few areas show bare seepy sand and low rosette-forming herbs. Two streamheads are very wide and swampy in character, because the powerline crosses them farther downstream than the other streamheads. The powerline is flanked by areas of fire-suppressed pine/oak communities and planted pine plantations. In the former, longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) is the sole canopy tree, with turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*) the prime understory tree and sparse wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) on the ground. In the latter, longleaf has been replaced by planted loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), the oaks mostly removed, and there is moderate to dense wiregrass and good herb diversity.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: The portion west of Marks Creek is managed for pine timber/pulp; nonetheless, the ground layer is in relatively good condition with intact wiregrass. All upland areas are in need of fire management to restore ecological integrity. The streamheads could also benefit from a shift from cutting to fire. ATVs have caused some rutting. No part of the site is currently protected.

NATURAL COMMUNITIES: Streamhead Pocosin, Xeric Sandhill Scrub (Sandhills Variant), Pine Scrub Oak Sandhill.